

Dear Parent or Guardian:

As part of the information our schools provide to you concerning student and school health issues, **(Insert District Name)** is making you aware of a potentially fatal bacterial infection that strikes teenagers and college students at a higher rate than other age groups. This information will give you the facts about the disease and help you take precautions to prevent your child from becoming ill with meningococcal disease.

Meningococcal disease, commonly known as meningitis, can be misdiagnosed as something less serious because early symptoms are similar to those of influenza or other common viral illnesses. Symptoms include high fever, headache, nausea and stiff neck.

The disease can come on quickly and may cause death or permanent disability (brain damage, organ failure, loss of hearing and limb amputation) within hours of the first symptoms. Although the disease is rare, it can be prevented through vaccination.

Meningococcal disease is spread by air droplets and direct contact with secretions from infected persons, through coughing without covering the mouth and kissing. Teenagers and college students can reduce the risk of contracting the disease through immunization and by not sharing personal items such as food utensils, water bottles and drinking glasses.

A safe and effective vaccine is available to protect against four of the five strains of bacteria that cause meningococcal disease. Although teens and college students are at greater risk for contracting the disease, up to 83 percent of the cases in this age group may be prevented through immunization.

For those teenagers who have not been previously vaccinated, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends immunization at high school entry and for all incoming college freshmen who will live in dormitories (only one shot required). Until vaccine supplies increase, the CDC recommends deferring immunization for 11 and 12 year olds.

For more information about meningococcal disease, you should consult their child's physician, school nurse or local health department staff. Information also is available online from these health-related organizations:

American Academy of Family Physicians, [www.aafp.org](http://www.aafp.org)  
American Academy of Pediatrics, [www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org)  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)  
Meningitis Foundation of America, [www.musa.org](http://www.musa.org)  
National Association of School Nurses, [www.nasn.org](http://www.nasn.org)  
National Foundation for Infectious Diseases, [www.nfid.org](http://www.nfid.org)  
National Meningitis Association, [www.nmaus.org](http://www.nmaus.org)

In addition, the Kentucky Department of Education provides links to this information and the above Web addresses from its Web site at [www.education.kygov](http://www.education.kygov).